Princesses and Mermaids

A Taryn and Kevin High Seas Adventure

by Terry Boucher

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Dedication:

With Love to the Blessed Virgin Mary, My Queen and My Mother

Chapter 1

A Far-Off Shore

Taryn stood on the dock near the shoreline of Jabalia, a beautiful country on the warm tropical waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Princess Jameela came up to her as she looked out over the ocean. “You look like you are deep in Thought,” the Princess said to Taryn.

“I am just staring out at the ocean and wondering how it is that I came to be here in your beautiful country,” responded Taryn. “Last year at this time I was a living a very simple life as the daughter of a carpenter and librarian. I never traveled very far from my hometown. Now my brother and I are here in a faraway country across the sea with the Prince of my country on a trading mission. It all seems like a dream.”

“Yes, I know what you mean,” laughed Jameela. “Sometimes life can take unexpected twists and turns. You need to be able to roll with the changes. Just take each day as it comes. Anyway, I am very glad your life has gone through these changes because I am so very happy to have gotten to know you.”

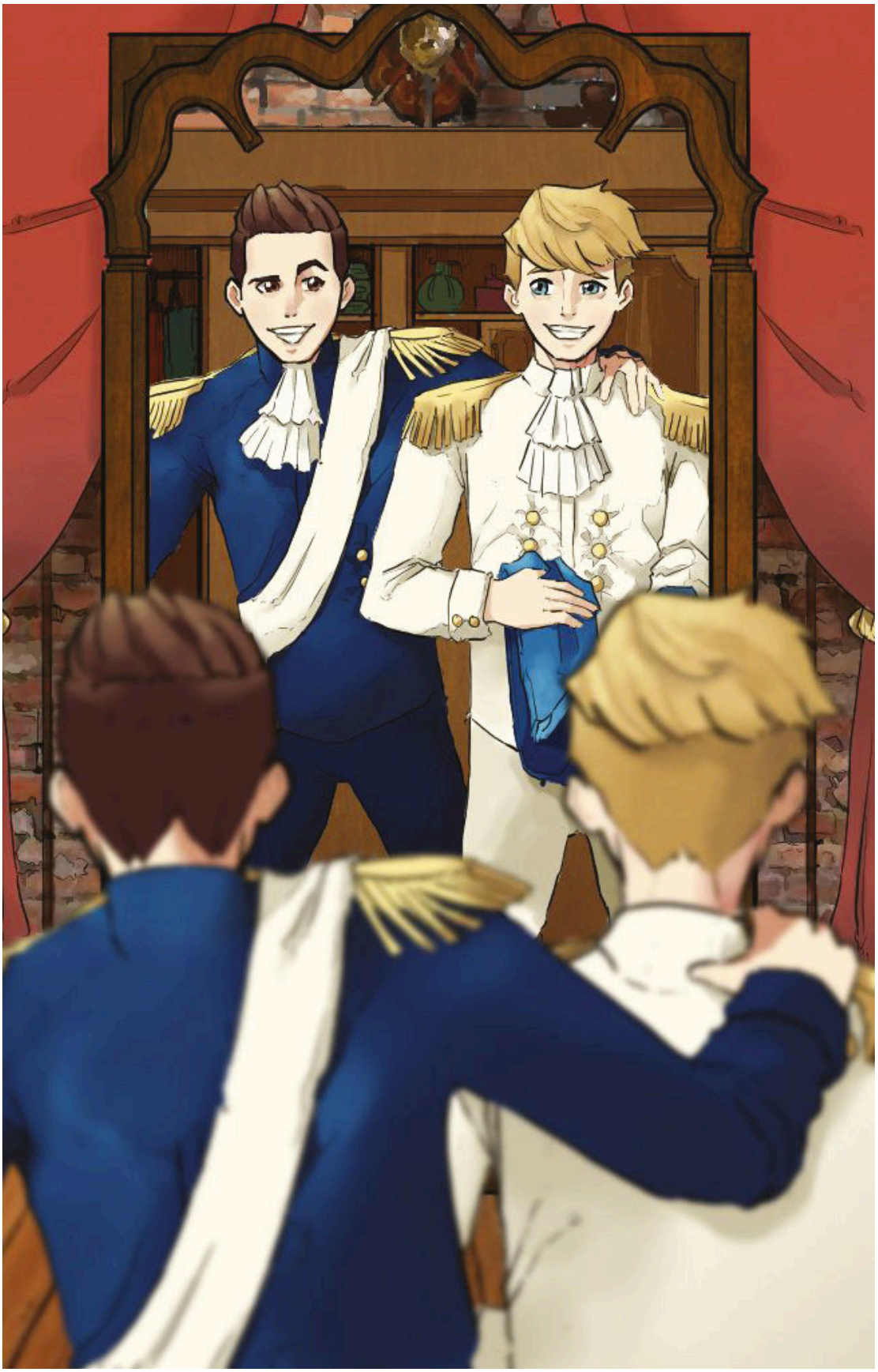
“I am glad, too,” replied Taryn. “It has been so much fun to meet you and your family. Your country is so colorful with its lush green trees and colorful flowers and birds.”

“That is one of the benefits of living in the Tropics,” Jameela said as she enjoyed the warm sunshine. “But I would like to visit your country sometime and see snow. It would be nice to see how people in other parts of the world live. Come, let us get ready for your farewell dinner tonight. My father is going to make it very special. I will help you pick out a very colorful dress in the style of my people.” The two of them went to the castle together to get dressed.

Meanwhile, Prince Kevin was already at the castle. He was getting ready for the dinner in a formal white suit with two rows of gold buttons going down each side of the front and gold bars on the shoulders. He was holding the royal blue sash that he was going to wear across his chest.

He thought to himself, “So far everything seems to be going very well on this trip. I sure hope Taryn is making a good impression on the King and Queen.” He thought back to the conversation he had with his mother back home in Athanasia before he left on this journey. She told him that she supported his relationship with Taryn even though she was a common girl without a royal background. However, it would still be important for her to learn how to conduct affairs of state if he really decided she was the girl he wanted to marry. If she was going to become a princess, she had to learn to act like a princess and be able to represent the crown properly. If not, Kevin may have a hard time with the nobility of the kingdom. He needed them to accept her as well. Otherwise it would be hard for them to trust his judgment.

King Matthew and Queen Victoria decided that inviting Taryn to accompany Kevin on this trade mission to Jabalia would be a good way to see if she could learn how to act as a representative of the crown in an appropriate way. Because Taryn was a single young lady, her brother James was invited along to be her chaperone.



Just then James knocked on the door. “May I come in, Prince Kevin?” he asked.

“Certainly,” replied Kevin. “I am just about finished dressing. How is my newest trade representative today?”

“I am doing well. I spent some time down at the beach today. The water here is so warm and clear,” responded James, who was wearing a similar outfit to Kevin’s except that his was navy blue with gold buttons, and his sash was white. “How do I look in my fancy clothes?”

“You look dashing. All the young ladies will be wanting to dance with you,” said Kevin reassuringly.

Kevin liked James. The young man was smart and very resourceful. He was good with his hands like his father Joseph, who was a carpenter. But he also was well educated, as you would expect of the son of a librarian, which his mother Rachel was. That made him an interesting person to talk to.

“Oh, I am sure all the ladies will be wanting to dance with you, the exotic prince from the faraway northern land,” laughed James.

“Well, we will see how your sister likes that!” laughed Kevin in return. “Come, let us go find her and then go to dinner.”

Chapter 2

A Dinner Party

Prince Kevin and James went to Taryn's room and knocked on the door. Taryn came out wearing a beautiful Dashiki dress. It was yellow with a blue pattern down the front and along the sides and sleeves. It matched her blond hair and blue eyes.

"Hey, sis, where did you get such a pretty dress? I have never seen this before," exclaimed James.

Taryn replied, "Princess Jameela loaned it to me. Isn't it beautiful?"

Prince Kevin responded, "It certainly is. You definitely look like you belong here in Jabalia with that dress. Come, let us go. We don't want to keep King Kiato and Queen Anika waiting. Captain Ryan and his wife Catherine will meet us there."

Kevin took Taryn by the arm and escorted her to the banquet hall while James followed closely behind.

Captain Ryan was the captain of the Courageous, the royal navy ship that had brought Kevin and the others to Jabalia from Athanasia. It was customary for the ship's captain to accompany the royal trade delegation at formal events such as that evening's farewell dinner. He didn't usually bring his wife with him on sailing voyages. But since Taryn was coming along, he brought Catherine along as well to keep Taryn company, and also to give her the opportunity to see another part of the world. Other than sailors, most people didn't travel much in those days because travel was hard and could be dangerous.

Kevin, Taryn, and James arrived at the entrance to the banquet hall, where Captain Ryan and Catherine were waiting along with one of King Kiato's ministers.

"Good evening, your Highness," said Captain Ryan as he bowed to the prince. He was dressed in a formal Captain's jacket and white pants. Catherine bowed as well.

"Good evening," replied Kevin. Turning to the minister, Kevin asked, "Please let us know where you would like us to sit."

"Right this way, your Highness. King Kiato, Queen Anika, and Princess Jameela are waiting for inside the hall," said the minister.

King Kiato greeted his guests and they all sat down. They had a wonderful meal. Taryn sat next to Princess Jameela and they had a wonderful conversation. Jameela was very pretty in a red floral-print dress that matched her brown skin and dark eyes. She had a red flower clipped in her black hair.

King Kiato said to Kevin, “I think this new trade partnership will be very good for our two kingdoms. We can trade the tropical fruits that grow here along with the fine fabrics we make with your people, and we can benefit from the wheat, vegetables and hard woods of your country.”

Kevin agreed, “Yes, I think it will improve the lives of both of our peoples to have a wider selection of foods and other goods. I am looking forward to a long and prosperous relationship.”

King Kiato became solemn for a moment as he said to Kevin, “However, I must warn you as you leave for home tomorrow that a band of pirates has been active in this area. Keep an eye out for them as you sail home. Be prepared to fight them off if necessary.”

Captain Ryan assured the King and the Prince, “Thank you for the warning, your Majesty. I will have the guns and cannons of the Courageous ready for them if the dirty scoundrels show up. I have dealt with their kind before and my crew will be ready.”

“Glad to hear it,” said the King. “But enough of that. Let’s start the music and the dancing.”

The first dance was a line dance that was traditional among the people of Jabalia, with four men and four women dancing in rhythm to the drums and the mbira, which is a like a thumb piano. Then the floor opened up for couples' dancing. Prince Kevin danced with Taryn for most of the evening, while James took turns dancing with the other young Jabalian ladies in attendance. Princess Jameela danced with the tall, handsome son of the Prime Minister, whose name was Zuberi. His friendly smile and dark, sparkling eyes made his face shine as he danced with the beautiful princess.

During a break Taryn asked Jameela about Zuberi, "You have been spending a lot of time with him. Is he someone special?"

"Yes, he and I have known each other since we were children. He is very nice, and he is wise for a young man. And, oh is he handsome!" laughed Jameela. "We have talked about marriage, but nothing has been set yet. How about you and Prince Kevin? The two of you seem to be getting along very well."

"Yes, he is very nice, and so down to Earth. But we aren't at the point of talking about marriage yet. We are still getting to know each other," replied Taryn.

"I understand," said Jameela. "I think it is wise to make sure you know each other before taking a big step like marriage. Come, let me introduce you to Zuberi."

Taryn called to Kevin and James and the three of them went with Jameela to meet Zuberi. The five of them talked for several minutes and got to know each other, and then they went back to the dance floor.

Soon the party was over, and everyone left to retire for the evening. Taryn, Kevin, and James needed a good night's sleep because they had to begin their journey home to Athanasia in the morning.

Chapter 3

A New Friend

The next morning Prince Kevin, Taryn, and James were getting ready to leave on the Courageous . King Kiato, Queen Anika, Princess Jameela came to see them off. Zuberi was there as well. After they said their goodbyes Captain Ryan said that it was time to embark on their journey. It was mid-morning when they set sail.

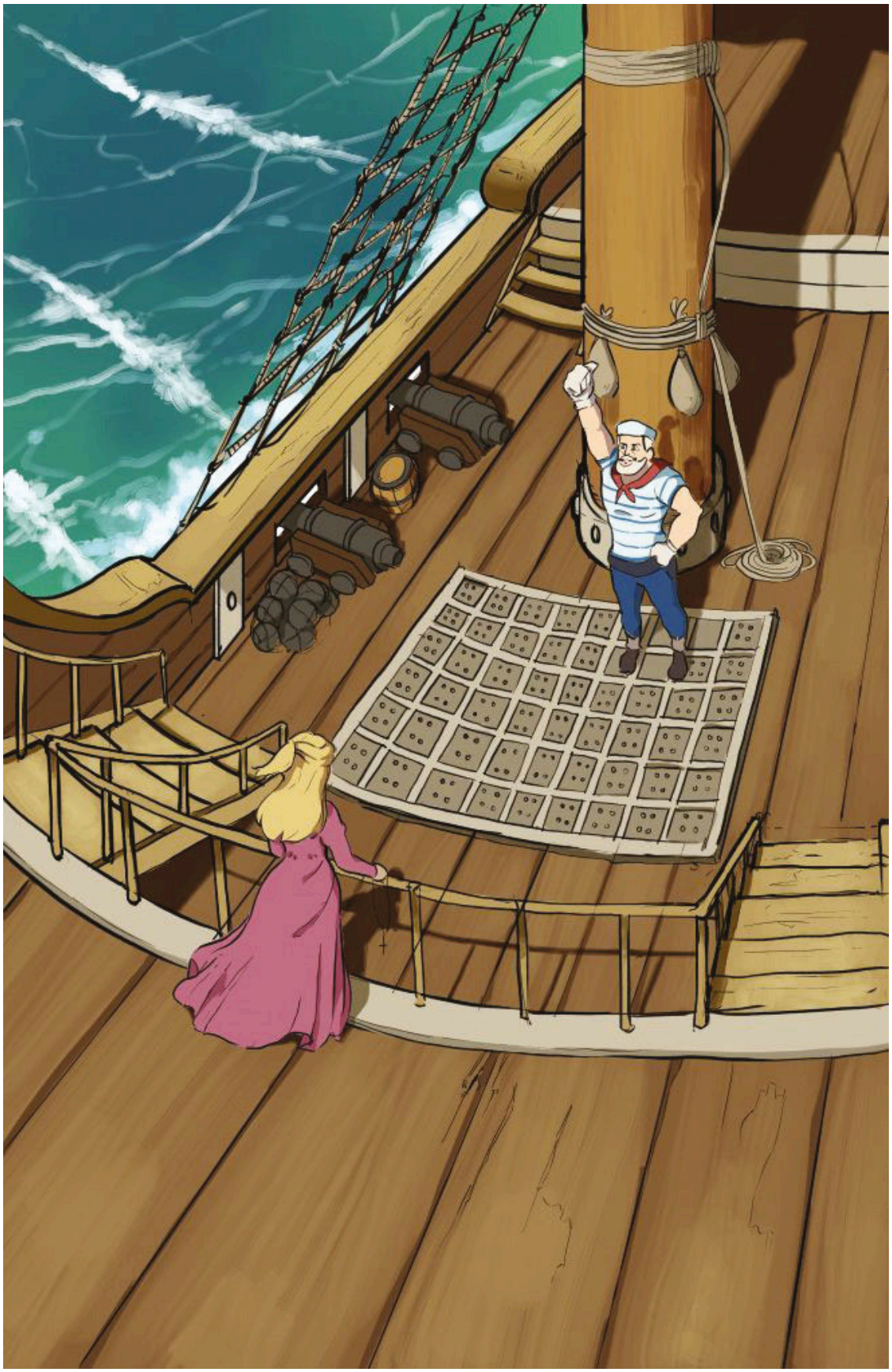
The crew got busy with their chores on the ship. Prince Kevin was in the office writing the details of their meeting with King Kiato for his father, King Matthew. Taryn was standing outside her cabin looking at the ocean talking with Catherine.

“I’m glad you came on this trip Catherine, or I would be the only woman on board,” said Taryn.

“The pleasure is mine,” replied Catherine. “I don’t usually go with the Captain on his journeys, especially if I would be the only woman. But this trip sounded exotic, going to the South Seas, so I really wanted to come along.”

Just then Captain Ryan called out for Catherine to come join him in the cabin, so Taryn was by herself looking out at the sea. She decided to take

advantage of the quiet time, so she reached into her pocket and took out her rosary beads and began to pray. But before she had gotten very far, she heard a voice calling out to her from the deck below.



“Beg your pardon, my Lady, but I see you are holding the prayer beads. It reminds me of my mother. She used to use the blessed beads to pray. You are stirring fond memories in my heart,” called one of the sailors from below. He was an older man, with a white beard and a gentle smile.

“Why, yes, I do like to pray the rosary. The beads help me to focus while I am praying,” answered Taryn. “But you don’t have to call me a ‘lady’. I am just a common girl. Please, call me Taryn. And what is your name?”

“I am called Felix,” said the sailor.

Taryn responded, “Well, it is a pleasure to meet you Felix. I bet you have many stories to tell of the sea.”

“I have sailed the seas for many seasons. I have seen many lands and tasted many exotic foods. But of all the things I have seen, the strangest is that I have seen mermaids, right here in these tropical waters,” said Felix.

“Mermaids! Oh, I have read about them, but I never knew if they were real or not,” exclaimed Taryn.

“They are real all right! I have seen them with my own eyes. Mermaids and Mermen. Swimming around with fishy tails,” responded Felix excitedly. “It is said they watch over good sailors, but woe to the pirates for the mermaids don’t like their kind one bit!”

“Do you think we might get to see some of them?” asked Taryn.

“You never know. But keep your eyes open and you just might,” said Felix assuringly.

Taryn said, “That would be wonderful. You know, I am just a simple girl from the country. I haven’t seen many strange things in my lifetime. In fact, I have never even been outside of Athanasia until this trip.”

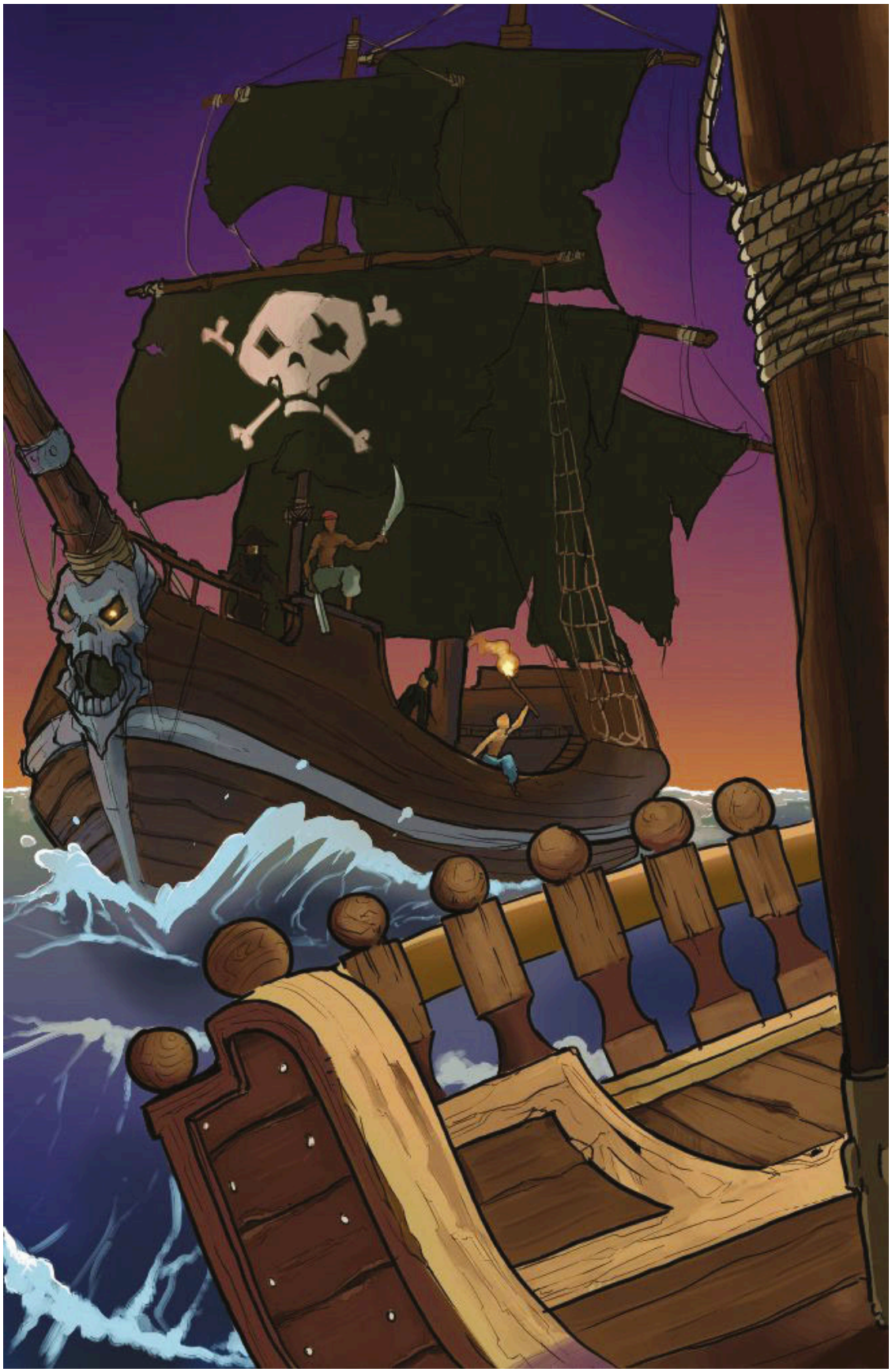
“Oh, don’t sell yourself short, Miss Taryn. You seem like a fine lass to me, and the king has entrusted you on this mission, so he sees something special in you for sure. Excuse me, but I must be getting back to my chores now,” said Felix. He tipped his hat to her and went about his duties.

Taryn thought about what Felix had said. She thought mermaids were just fairytales, but Felix seemed very sincere. And as she was discovering, the world was a much bigger place than her little village. She stood there looking at the sun shining on the ocean waves and marveled at how her life had changed since she and James had gotten stuck in a snowbank outside the castle last Christmas Eve. Prince Kevin offered them shelter for the night, and then he came to visit her on New Year’s Day to return a necklace she had left behind. Now, she was here in the South Seas wondering if mermaids could be real. Who would have imagined this a year ago?

Taryn finished her prayers and then went back to her cabin. Soon James called to her that it was time for supper.

Chapter Four

Pirates!



As evening approached the sun was getting low in the sky, making it hard to look in its direction. Taryn, Kevin, and James came out of the Captain's dining room after supper. Suddenly they heard a shout from the sailor in the crow's nest.

"Ahoy, Captain! A ship is closing in on us fast from the west. I think it is a pirate ship," yelled the sailor.

Captain Ryan ran for his telescope. He looked at the ship and saw that it was flying the skull and cross bones on its mast. "It certainly is pirates. Those rascals want to steal all the goods we just loaded onto the ship in Jabalia," cried Captain Ryan. "We'll try to outrun them. Trim the sails!"

The crew tried to outrun the pirates, but the added weight from the goods that were loaded onto the ship in Jabalia weighed them down. Soon the pirates pulled up along the Starboard side of the Courageous.

"Grab your swords! Load the cannons!" commanded the Captain. "Catherine, you and Taryn get in the cabin and lock the door!"

Kevin grabbed a sword. James grabbed one too.

Kevin asked, "James, do you know how to use that?"

James replied, “I have used plenty of tools in my father’s shop. I know how to wield this.”

The pirates had stretched ropes from their ship to the Courageous. They were swinging over and landing on the deck. Most of the royal navy crew was engaging them with swords. Felix was fighting against a big, strong pirate.

Just then a pirate climbed up to the deck where Taryn and Catherine were hiding. Kevin saw him and ran over to stop him. The two were engaged in a fierce swordfight. The pirate had his back to the door of the cabin where Taryn and Catherine were.

Taryn looked out the window of the cabin and said to Catherine, “I can’t let Kevin do this alone. That pirate is huge.” Before Catherine could stop her Taryn swung the door open and smashed a chair against the back of the pirate’s head. She was running over to Kevin when suddenly a cannon fired a shot from the pirate ship. The cannon ball was headed right at Taryn!

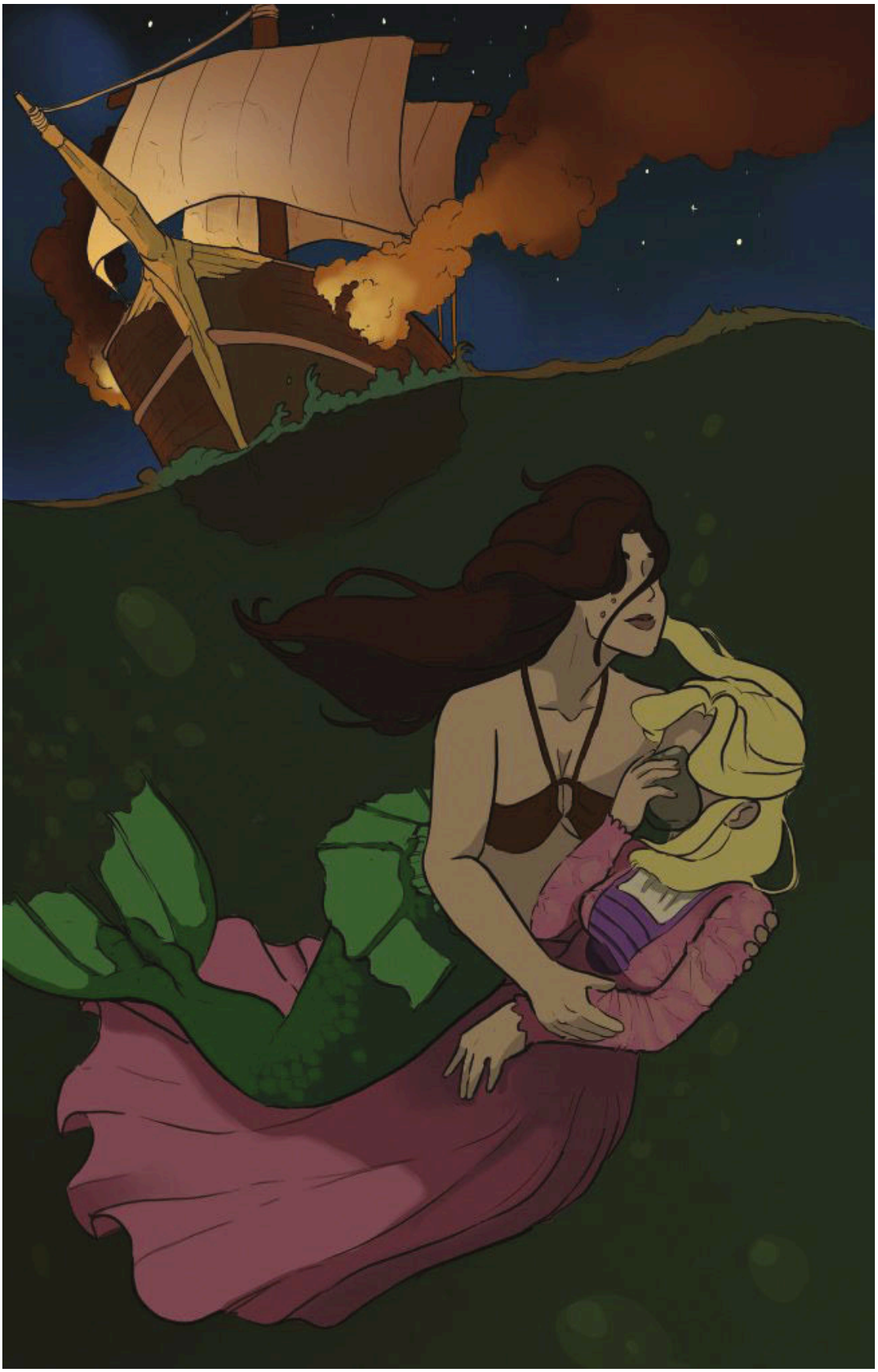
Kevin quickly jumped in front of her and pulled her toward him as the cannon ball hit the railing of the deck. A sharp piece of wood broke off the railing and landed in Kevin’s back. Kevin screamed in pain as the wood stuck into his skin. Taryn grabbed hold of him, but just as she did the ship recoiled from the impact of the cannon ball hitting it and the two of them tumbled off of the deck towards the ocean below!

Felix saw them falling off the deck and cried out, “Miss Taryn! NO!” He felt a wild rush of fear as he saw Kevin and Taryn plunge into the water. But he couldn’t rush to help because he was fighting the big pirate. With a burst of strength, he pushed the pirate away to give himself a minute to look over the side. He searched frantically among the waves for his young friend. He then spotted something splash in the water that wasn’t Taryn, but still gave him a feeling of comfort that Taryn would be all right. Then he turned back to the pirate with renewed strength and fury.

Taryn felt herself flying through the air, down towards the water. She lost her grip on Kevin and then took a big breath as she plunged into the dark, warm tropical water.

Chapter Five

Rescued



Taryn felt herself plunge deep into the water. Her first thought was to get back to the surface and get some air, and then try to find Prince Kevin. Suddenly she felt two arms grab hold of her from behind and with a strong push her head broke the surface. She gasped for air as a young lady's voice came from behind her saying, "Take a deep breath and then put this mask over your mouth and nose. I will get you out of here."

Taryn cried out, "What about Kevin?"

Her rescuer responded, "We've got your friend. Hurry, we need to get out of danger now!"

Taryn didn't really know what was happening, but she did as she was told. Suddenly they started moving through the water at a very fast pace. She felt a whipping action down by her feet and looked down to see that her rescuer had a tail. She must be a mermaid. I am being rescued by a mermaid!

Taryn thought that she must be in shock. She tried to look at where they were heading, but the salt from the water stung her eyes. She decided that she would just have to go along for the ride and see where this mermaid was taking her.

After a while, they popped up for air again. The mermaid said to her, "Take another good breath. We are going to take a deep dive."

Taryn did as she was told, and then they dove down and entered an underwater cave. They came up into the cave and broke the surface of the water. The cave was well lit, which surprised her. She could see the mermaid that rescued her along with a merman who was holding Kevin, plus another mermaid and two mermen. As they approached the side of the cave there was a platform with a ladder. Two men and two women with regular legs were standing there. The two women grabbed Taryn and pulled her out of the water. The two men grabbed Prince Kevin and pulled him out.

The merman who had rescued Kevin called out, “He is hurt. He had a piece of wood sticking in his back when he fell into the water. Take him to the infirmary. Check on the young lady as well. They both fell off the ship into the water.”

The two men carried Prince Kevin off with them. One of the women who helped pull Taryn out of the water began talking to her. She asked, “Are you all right? Did you get hurt in your fall?”

Taryn responded, “I think I am all right. I don’t think I hurt anything, but I am a bit shaken by all of this. Those are mermaids who saved us, right? Real mermaids?”

One of the women said, “We’ll explain all that. The important thing is that you aren’t hurt. Here, please sit down for a minute and catch your breath. What is your name?”

Taryn took a seat and started taking deep breaths. She wasn’t cold, but she started shaking. She was soaked through to her skin. The other woman came up with a big towel and wrapped it around her. She caught her breath and was beginning to settle down.

“My name is Taryn,” she said. “And that is Prince Kevin who was with me. We must have fallen into the water when the cannon ball from the pirate ship hit the railing of our ship right near us.”

“Oh, your friend is a prince. Don’t worry, we will take good care of him. And you as well. You are around friends here. My name is Joanna, and this is my sister Tabitha.”

“Can I see Prince Kevin? I want to make sure he is all right. I heard that merman say he had gotten hurt,” asked Taryn.

Joanna said, “Yes, we will bring you to him. But first, let’s get you into some dry clothes. Come along and we will take care of you.”

Chapter Six

On Board the Courageous

Felix fought the big pirate with a renewed fury and quickly disarmed him of his sword. Then he banged him on the head with a club and knocked him out. James had swung up to the deck where Taryn had been and used some rope to tie up the pirate that had attacked Taryn and Catherine.

Captain Ryan saw a pirate on the other ship trying to load another cannon and he quickly gave an order to fire back at him. Two of the crew members quickly aimed one of the Courageous' cannons as Captain Ryan shouted, "Fire away!" The cannon ball flew true and hit the pirate ship in the side right near the water line.

The ship began to take on water as the remaining pirates yelled, "Abandon ship! She is going down."

As pirates were jumping in the water from the sinking pirate ship, the crew of the Courageous was overpowering the pirates who had swung aboard the royal ship. The pirates began surrendering, and Captain Ryan commanded that they be locked in the brig. Then they helped the pirates who had jumped into the water to come on board, making sure they had no swords with them as they came up. They then put them all in the brig as they watched the pirate ship sink below the waves.

Captain Ryan said, “Good job, lads. We fought them off and kept our cargo safe. But we have suffered a great loss. Prince Kevin and Taryn went overboard, and the ship has suffered some damage.”

“Begging the Captain’s pardon,” said Felix, “But I suspect that our prince and Miss Taryn are going to be just fine. We will just need to send out a search party for them.”

“And what makes you think that, Felix?” questioned the captain.

“Just call it a hunch, sir. I don’t think they went down. I think the current took them away towards the old volcano. Trust this old sailor. I have seen the likes of this before in these waters,” said Felix reassuringly.

“I sure hope you’re right,” exclaimed James. “That was my sister who went overboard.”

Captain Ryan said, “Well, it is late, and the sun has set. Twilight won’t last much longer. We need to make repairs. I want the Night Watch sailors to head back towards Jabalia so we can fix the ship and bring these scoundrels to justice. We can send a search party out from there. The rest of you can head below and get some rest.”

Chapter Seven

Mermaids?

Joanna and Tabitha were helping Taryn get into dry clothes. They picked a nice aqua-blue dress for her to wear. There was a knock on the door and a women's voice called out, "May I come in?"

Joanna said, "Oh yes, Magdalena, please come in."

Then Taryn saw the mermaid who had rescued her peek around the door. She had beautiful, long brown hair and brown eyes. She looked just like Joanna and Tabitha. She then came in the room, but now she had regular legs. Taryn gave her a confused look.

"Hi!" She said. "My name is Magdalena. I see that you have already met my sisters. That stunned look on your face must be because you see me walking on regular legs."

"Yes, it is," replied Taryn. "Didn't you have a tail when you rescued me?"

"Yes, I did have a tail. Joanna and Tabitha have tails too. We all have tails. You see, we are all mermaids and mermen. Or at least that is what most people who live on surface think," said Magdalena, with a smile.

"I don't understand," said Taryn. "How can you change back and forth from a human to a mermaid."

Magdalena explained, “It’s really very simple. You see, we’re regular people, just like you. We have legs all the time. We don’t really turn into mermaids. The tails are really just something we put on over our legs when we swim. They have little motors in them to make us go faster. There is no such thing as a real mermaid. That is, there are no real people who have fish tails.”

Taryn was a bit relieved to learn she was among regular people just like her, but she was still a bit confused. “What’s a motor?” she asked.

Magdalena said, “We will tell you all about it, but first let’s go to the infirmary and see how your companion is doing.”

Chapter Eight

Inside the Infirmary

The doctor had pulled all the slivers of wood out of Kevin's shoulder and then cleaned and bandaged the wound. Kevin appeared to be sleeping. Magdalena and her sisters came into the infirmary with Taryn, who was amazed at how bright and clean it was in the room. There weren't any candles or lanterns. The light seemed to be coming from panels in the ceiling. She wanted to ask about this, but she was more concerned about Kevin.

Magdalena asked, "How is he, Dr. Luke?"

Dr. Luke said, "He will be fine. The wood only hit his shoulder muscles. It didn't touch his heart or his lungs. He just needs to rest. I gave him some pain killer, but his shoulder will be sore in the morning."

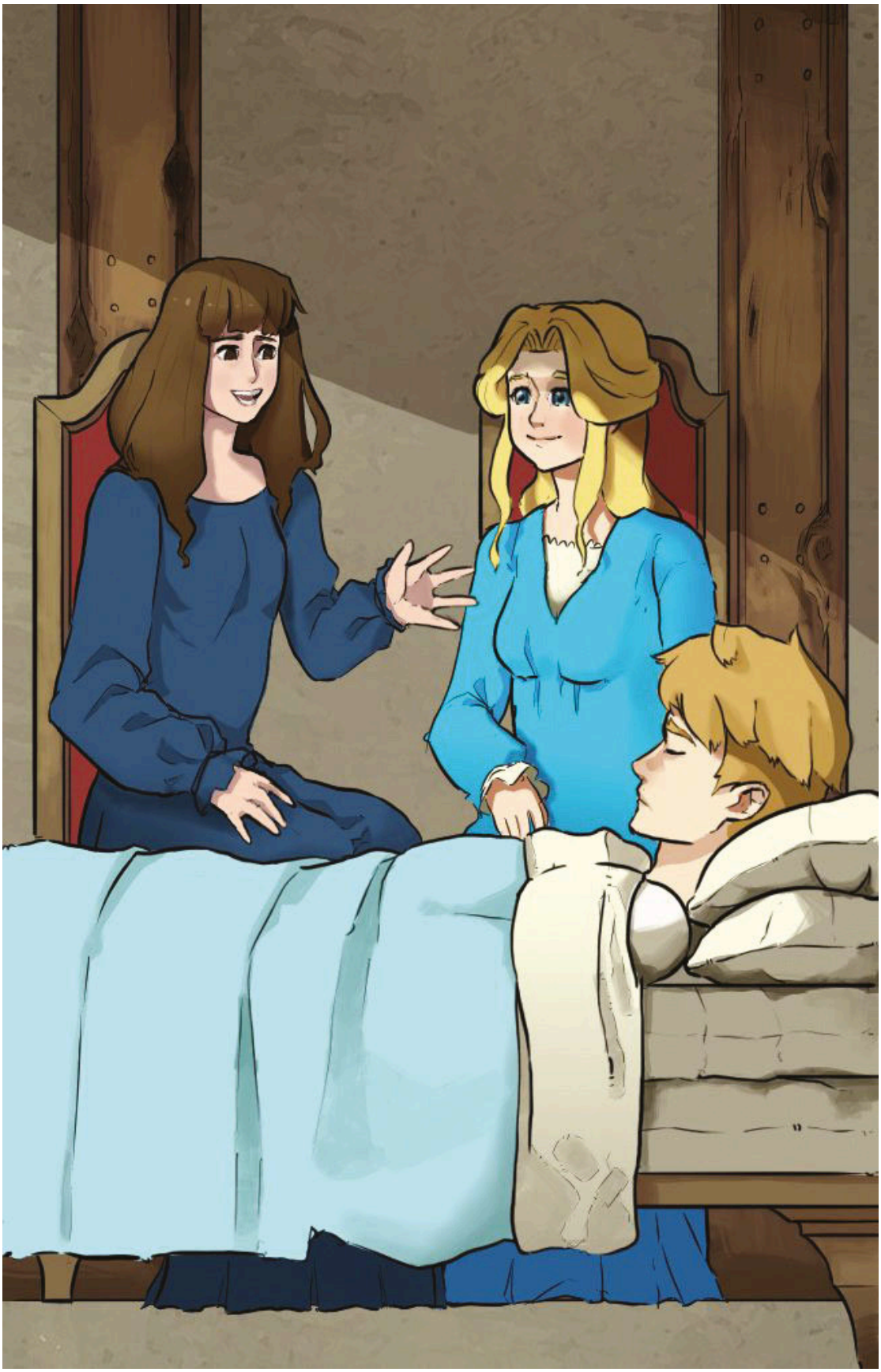
Taryn asked, "May I sit with him?"

Dr. Luke replied, "Certainly. I will be back in the morning to check on him."

Magdalena asked, “I know it is very late in the day, but are you hungry?”

Taryn replied, “No, it was after supper when the pirates attacked. But I am very tired.”

“Of course,” said Magdalena. “Joanna, please stay here with her. Tabitha, would you please get her a mattress and blanket to sleep on? I suspect she doesn’t want to leave her companion. I will go and let Barnas know what is happening.”



After Tabitha and Magdalena left, Joanna asked Taryn, “Where are you and Kevin from? We don’t often see people with blonde hair in these waters.”

“We are from a small kingdom called Athanasia,” responded Taryn. “It is in the northern lands. It is quite far from here. Prince Kevin was here to meet with King Kiato of Jabalia to discuss a trading relationship between our two countries. The Queen sent me along to accompany him.”

“Oh, yes, we know of King Kiato. He is a good man. Are you and Kevin betrothed?” asked Joanna.

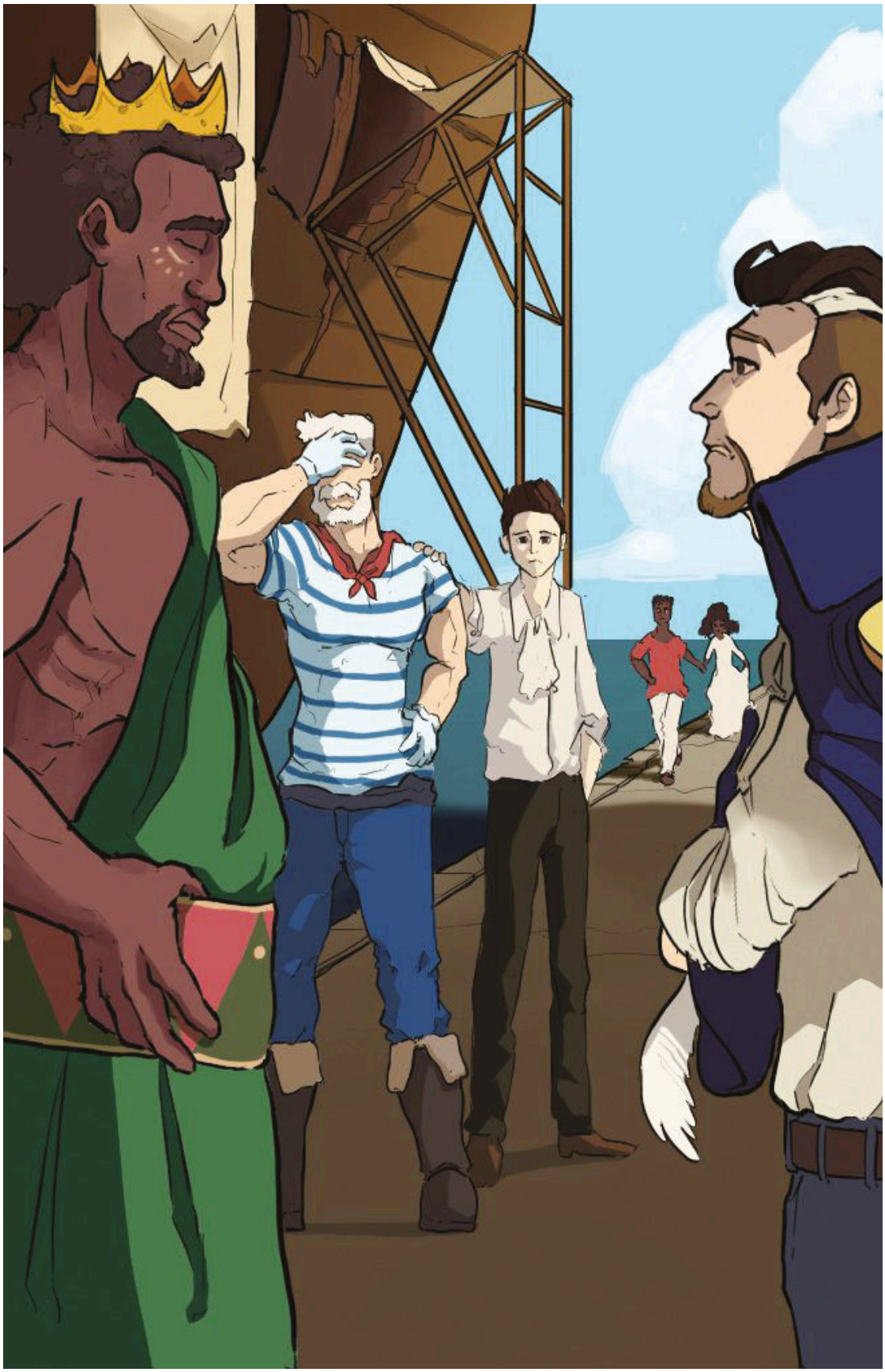
“No, at least not yet. Maybe someday. I think the Queen sent me on this journey to see if I can handle to duties of a royal princess. You see, I am really just a common girl from the country.”

Just then Tabitha returned with a rolled-up mattress and blankets.

Taryn had a number of questions, but she was very tired. So, they unrolled the mattress on the floor and Taryn curled up to sleep. As she lay there she realized that Kevin had saved her life because the splintering wood that landed in his shoulder was headed straight for her heart before he jumped in the way to cover her. Exhausted, Taryn fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter Nine

Meanwhile, Back in Jabalia



After sailing through the night, the Courageous pulled into dock in Jabalia mid-morning. A courier sent a message to King Kiato, who came to meet them at the dock.

“It looks like you ran into some trouble, Captain,” said the king.

Captain Ryan responded, “Yes, your majesty. We ran into those pirates you had warned us about. We got the better of them, but not before they could do some damage to the ship. We have them locked up in the brig. Can I leave them with you to stand trial? I don’t have enough food to bring them all the way back to Athanasia.”

“Yes, of course. They have caused our ships some trouble too, so it would be appropriate to have them stand trial here,” said the King. “Where is Prince Kevin?”

Captain Ryan turned solemn as he said, “I am afraid our good prince was knocked overboard during the scuffle with the pirates. Miss Taryn went over with him.”

“Oh! What a tragedy,” exclaimed the king sadly.

“We would like to send out a search party while we do some repairs on the ship. We would need to borrow a small boat from your fleet,” replied Captain Ryan. “My man Felix here is familiar with the currents here and believes he knows where they might be.”

Just as they were discussing this, Jameela and Zuberi were running up to see why the Courageous had returned. She heard the terrible news, as well as what the captain said about Felix.

She cried out, “Father, I can take them out on the search party. I know the currents around here very well. Zuberi and I will take Mr. Felix out to search for them.”

“I am going as well,” said James. “I need to find my sister.”

“I’m sorry, James, my lad. But I need you here. With your carpenter skills I need you to help with the repairs on the Courageous. Felix is an experienced sailor, and Jameela and Zuberi know these waters. Your skills will be put to better use here,” said the Captain to James.

King Kiato said, “Jameela, take the catamaran. It will be fast. Hurry, there is no time to lose.”

Felix put his hand on James’ arm in a reassuring way and said, “Keep heart, lad. We will find her. I promise you.” He then ran with Jameela and Zuberi to the catamaran and they were on their way.

Chapter Ten

A Prince Awakens

Taryn awoke the next morning after sleeping soundly through the night. She got up and went over to the bed where Kevin lay. She touched her hand to his arm and leaned over and kissed him. He opened his eyes. He looked at Taryn and then around the room.

“Where are we?” he asked. “The last thing I remember was holding you and then my shoulder exploded with pain. It is still a bit sore. Who bandaged it? Why is this room so bright?”

Taryn replied, “I am not quite sure where we are, and I am not quite sure how to tell about how we got here. But the people who saved us and brought us here are friendly. They are the ones who cleaned your wound and bandaged your shoulder.”

Just then there was a knock on the door. In came Dr. Luke, who introduced himself to Kevin and asked, “How is my patient this morning?”

“My shoulder is a bit sore, but otherwise I think I am fine. I am a bit hungry,” responded Kevin.

Dr. Luke checked Kevin’s forehead to see if he had a fever, and he changed the bandage.

“There doesn’t appear to be any infection. I think we got it cleaned just in time. Joanna and Tabitha are waiting outside to take you to breakfast,” said the doctor.

Taryn introduced Kevin to Joanna and Tabitha, and they went to breakfast. Kevin had a lot of questions, but Joanna said, “Let’s eat first. After breakfast we will take you to Magdalena and Barnas, her husband. Barnas is one of our leaders, and he will be able to answer your questions.”

When breakfast was done, Joanna and Tabitha brought them into the next room. Taryn saw Magdalena there with the man who had rescued Kevin.

“Prince Kevin, Miss Taryn, please allow me to introduce myself. I am Barnas, a Minister of our land. I am sure you have many questions. But before I answer them, I need to ask you a very important question.”

Kevin replied, “Minister Barnas, it is a pleasure to meet you. Thank you for your hospitality and for saving our lives. Please, ask me anything.”

Barnas continued, “You are welcome. It is our pleasure to help you. We are a very peaceful people, and in order to keep our land peaceful I need the two of you to promise me that you will keep our land a secret from the outside world.”

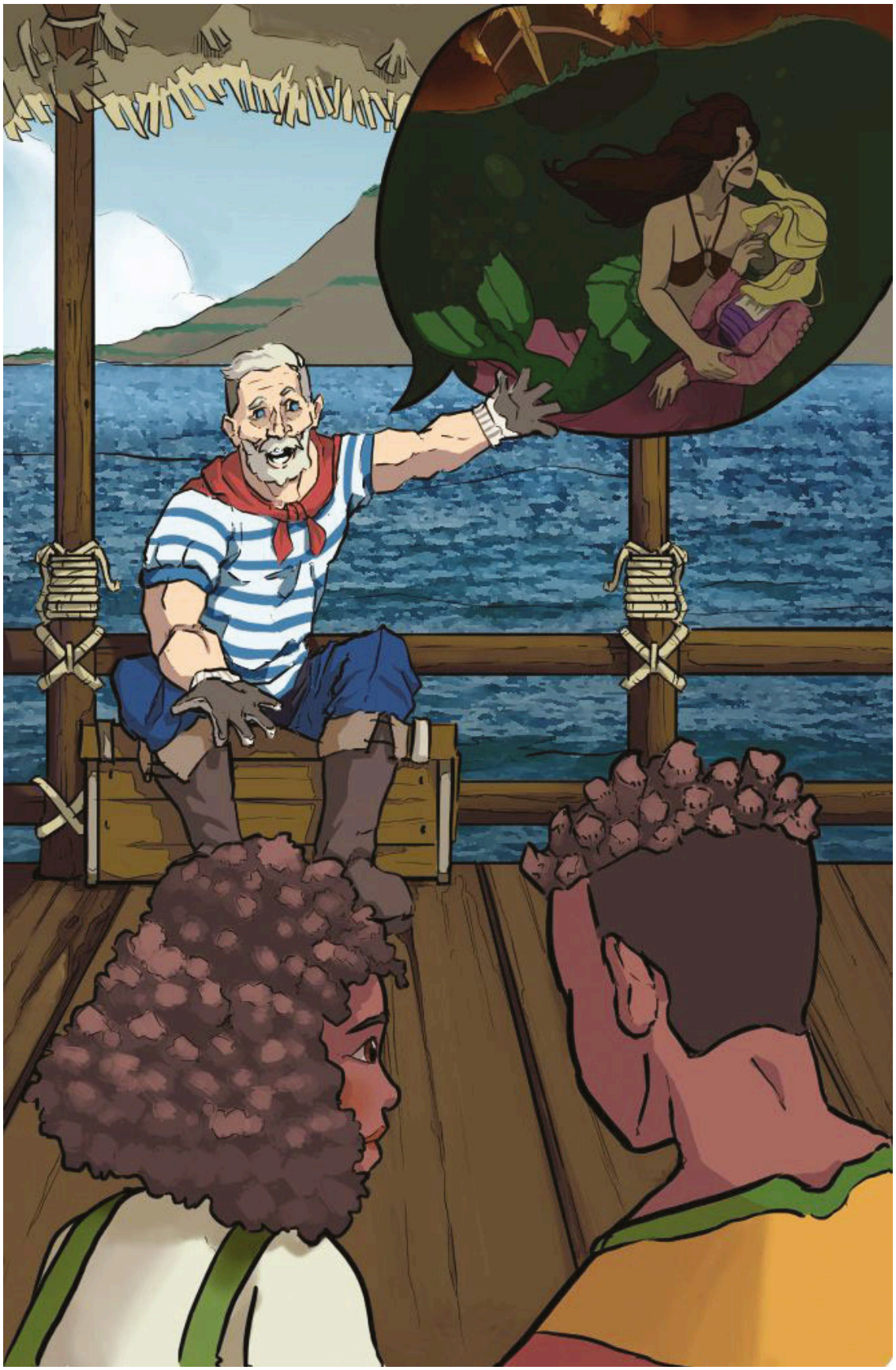
Kevin said, “We owe you our lives, so I will gladly honor your request. I will not speak a word of your land after we leave.”

“Nor will I,” added Taryn.

“Thank you for agreeing to keep our secret. And now, please step with me through this door,” said Barnas. He opened a door and the two of them stepped through, followed by the three sisters and Barnas.

Chapter Eleven

Some Truth at the Search Party



After Felix, Jameela, and Zuberi had left shore on the catamaran, Felix got a very serious look on his face and said to them, “I know our young prince and Miss Taryn are still alive. Now, please don’t think I am crazy, but I caught a glimpse of them after they fell overboard. I saw some merfolk grab them and bring them away from the battle scene with the pirates. I know that sounds hard to believe, but I have been a sailor a long time and I have seen mermaids before in these waters. I am speaking truly, your highness.”

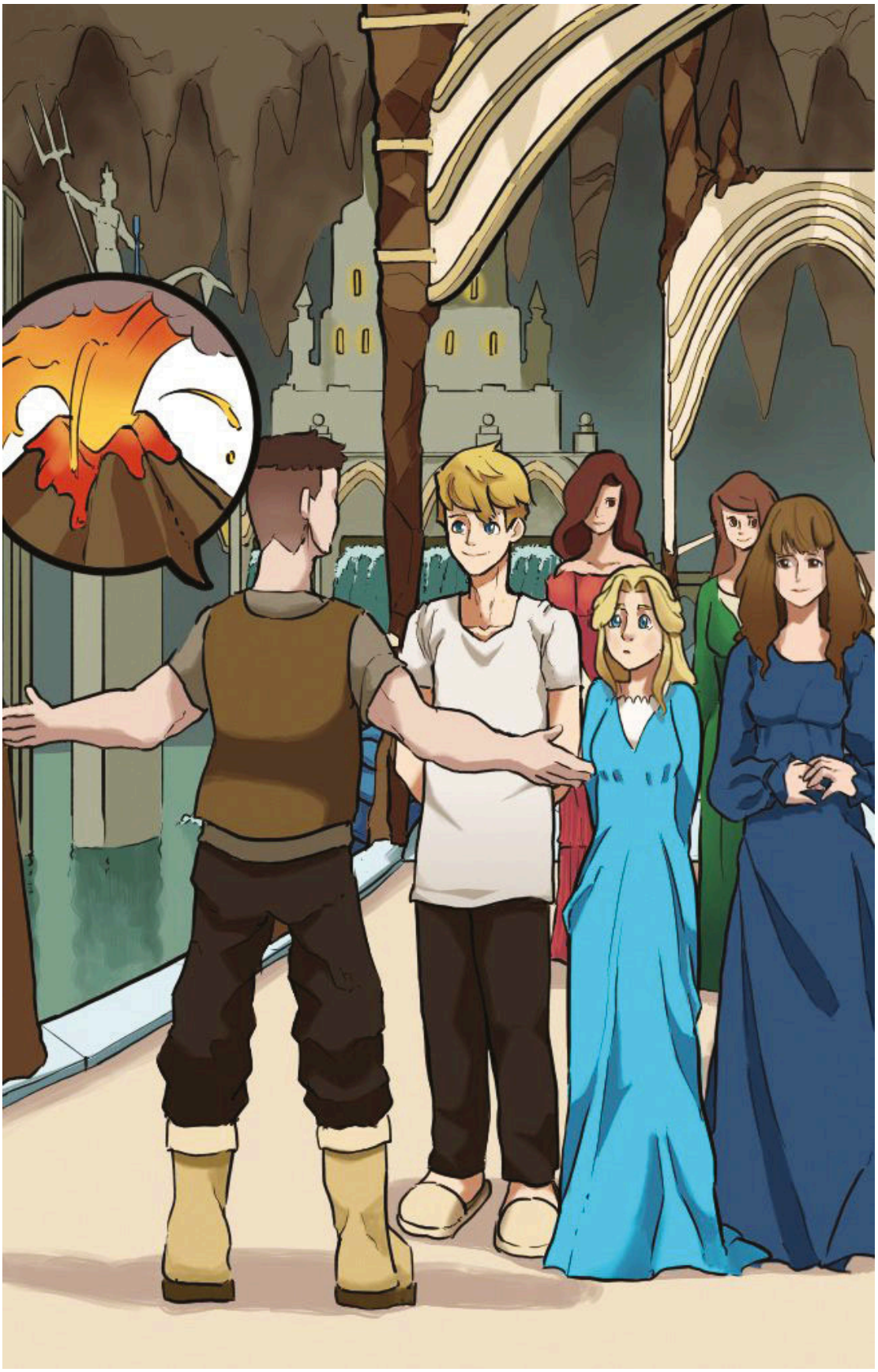
Princess Jameela said, “Well now, Mr. Felix, you don’t sound as crazy as you might think. At least not to me. And thank you for that information, because now I know exactly where to look for our friends. You see, I have not only seen mermaids here, but I have met them. I know where they live!”

Zuberi smiled and said, “Let’s head for the old volcano. It will be good to see our friends again.”

Felix looked very relieved. “Yes, let’s go. I promised myself, and James, that I would find Miss Taryn, and I intend on keeping that promise.”

Chapter Twelve

Secrets Revealed!



As they walked through the door as Barnas directed, Taryn's eyes opened wide in amazement! There was a whole city down here. There were buildings and roads and people walking around. It was all underground, but it was almost as bright as day. She looked at Kevin, whose eyes were open just as wide as hers were.

"What is this place?" asked Kevin, as Barnas led them down one of the streets.

"We call our land New Atlantis," said Barnas.

Kevin said, "I have read about a Lost Continent of Atlantis. Is this it?"

"Yes," said Barnas. "We are the children of that lost land, which was really just an island, not a continent. Atlantis was a great land that was further advanced than the rest of the world. We had great scientists who invented great things."

"It must have been wonderful," exclaimed Taryn.

Magdalena said, "It was wonderful in some ways. The people of Atlantis did have a lot of nice inventions that made life easier, like these panels that light up without needing to burn oil or wax. We use the underground heat from the volcano to create power to light our city. But there was a dark side to ancient Atlantis as well."

“Yes,” said Barnas. “Because the Atlanteans were more scientifically advanced then their neighbors, they grew arrogant. They went so far as to invade some of the surrounding nations and take people prisoner to be slaves in Atlantis. This caused terrible suffering for these people. One day the big volcano in the middle of the island erupted with such force that it caused an earthquake and the island began to sink. The enslaved peoples took advantage of the chaos and escaped with most of the boats.”

Joanna continued the story, “Many of the Atlanteans perished as the island sank, but some of them were able to take refuge in a set of caves near the center of the island in the side of the volcano. The heat from the volcano allowed them to have a power source to run their machines so they could grow food. There are a few openings near the top of the volcano that allow fresh air and sunlight to come in, so the people were able to survive. But for many long years they had no way to leave the caves because the boats were all taken by the escaping slaves or were destroyed when the island sank.”

Tabitha joined in, “The people were very sad and felt lost. They thought they were the kings of the world because of their inventions, but it was all gone so suddenly when the volcano erupted. All that was left of the island was the volcano, which also sank but the top is still sticking out of the water. It made them very humble. And no other nation came to help or look for them because they had been so evil beforehand.”

Kevin asked a question, “But eventually the people must have figured out how to leave. After all, you found us.”

Barnas responded, “Yes, Prince Kevin, they did. You didn’t really see because you were wounded, but when we rescued you, we had swimming tails, like the mermaids and mermen in your legends. You see, since the Atlanteans had no boats, they needed another way to travel. Eventually they figured out how to create a fish tail with a little motor in it that allowed people to swim very fast when they wore it.

Taryn said, “Magdalena, you mentioned this ‘motor’ last night. What is this?”

Magdalena responded, “Our scientists figured a way to store heat from the volcano into little power units that help us push the tails up and down very fast, so we can go much faster than if we just used our own muscle-power.”

Taryn just shook her head in amazement. “Oh, what a big world there was outside of her little village,” she thought.

Barnas continued, “They were able to swim to Greece, where they went to visit Athens. They were afraid to tell anyone where they were from because of their past history of enslaving people, so they blended in with the Athenians. While they were there, they heard a preacher named Paul tell them of the good news of a Savior who had come to free people from the bondage of evil. This Savior had risen from the dead and would come back at the end of time.”

Kevin exclaimed, “That was St. Paul, telling them about Jesus!”

“Yes, it was,” said Magdalena. “This was just the good news the Atlanteans needed to hear. Now their lives had meaning again. They would repent from their past history of slavery by vowing to help people with their inventions and treat everybody as their brothers and sisters. But they were afraid that if outsiders found out about the inventions, they might try to use them for evil purposes, just as the ancient Atlanteans did. So, they decided to keep themselves hidden and help others by protecting good ships from pirates

and other villains. We used our tails to move about the sea, and eventually the outside world developed a legend of ‘mermaids’.”

“That is how we found you,” said Barnas. “We were following that pirate ship and were there to help when your ship was attacked. We were going to join in the fight, but when the two of you fell into the water, we decided to bring you here to safety.”

Kevin said, “I am very grateful for your help and hospitality. And I promise you that when I am king of Athanasia, I will always to remember to treat all people fairly, as we are all brothers and sisters. And I will keep your secret for as long as I live.”

Magdalena said, “Come, let us finish showing you around our city. Then we will get you back to the outside world. I am sure people are very worried about you.”

Chapter Thirteen

Reunited

Just as they had finished their tour of the city, a messenger came to Barnas. “Sir, we have seen a boat approaching the small shore of the volcano. It looks like Princess Jameela and Zuberi along with another man who looks like a sailor from up north.”

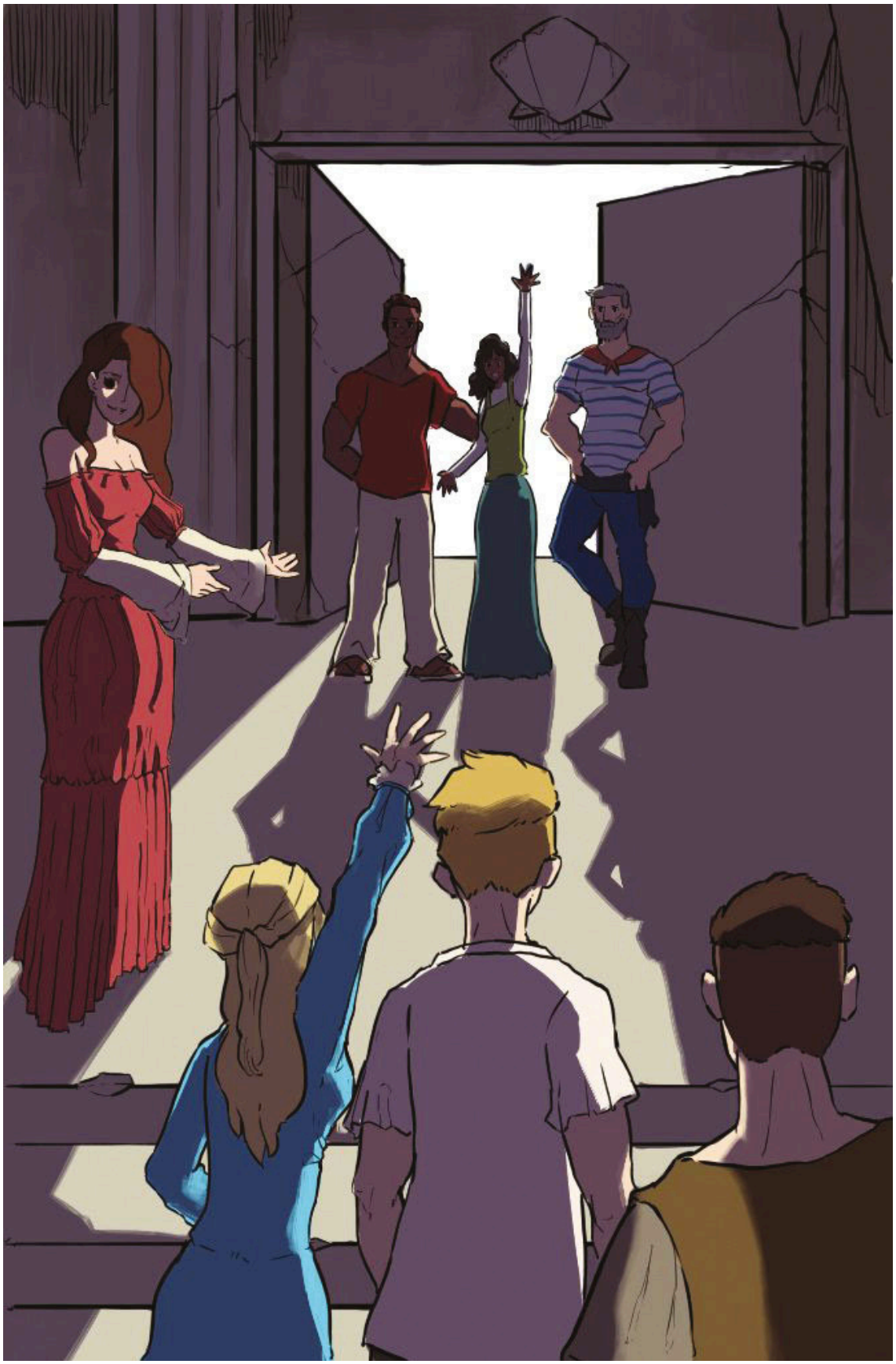
“They are probably looking for our friends here. Quick, greet them and invite them into the entry room,” said Barnas to the messenger. Then he turned to Kevin and Taryn, “It looks like it is time for you to go home. You must go and change into your own clothes or people might wonder about where these clothes came from.”

Kevin said, “Yes, that’s a good idea. But how did they know where to look for us? I thought your land is a secret?”

Joanna said, “It is a secret, but Princess Jameela and Zuberi know about it. They are our friends. They are the only people in Jabalia who know about us. But we don’t know who this other man is.”

Taryn responded, “I bet I know who it is. It must be Mr. Felix. He told me he had seen mermaids in these waters, and I bet he suspected who might have saved us. He is a good man and I am sure he will keep your secret.”

After Kevin and Taryn had changed, they went to the sea-level entry room and saw Princess Jameela and Zuberi, as well as Felix, just as Taryn suspected.



“Oh, I am so glad to see you, Miss Taryn. I would have been very sad if you were lost at sea,” exclaimed Felix.

Taryn said, “I am very glad to see you too, and I am grateful that you came to look for us. That shows that you are a good friend.”

Felix blushed. Barnas said to him, “Mr. Felix, you have been given the special privilege to see the land of the merfolk. Now I must ask you to please keep our secret. As you know, there are many people who would seek to steal our secrets and use them for no good purposes.”

“You have my solemn word. You have saved my prince and my lady. I will be forever in your debt for that,” replied Felix.

They said their goodbyes and got back on the boat to head to Jabalia. Taryn asked Jameela, “How did you get to meet the people of New Atlantis?”

Jameela said, “When I was about twelve, I thought I was a great sailor. I took a boat out by myself against my father’s orders. While I was out, a pirate ship came by and tried to capture me. I think they wanted to make me a slave. But before they could get me some mermaids rescued me while some mermen tore a hole in their ship. I was so frightened I couldn’t speak. They took me to their land and calmed me down. When I could speak, I told them where I lived. As they were bringing me home, we ran into Zuberi, who was looking for me. The two of us promised to keep their secret. We have come to visit them from time to time ever since.”

Taryn cried out, “Oh, I am so glad they were there to help you. I couldn’t imagine my good friend being a slave. There really are some wicked people in this world, aren’t there?”

Jameela responded, “Yes, there are. But there are many good people too, and we must work together to fight for what is good and true. You and I may look different on the outside, but inside we both have the same kind hearts.”

“Amen to that,” said Felix.

Chapter Fourteen

Time for Farewells

The rescue party returned to Jabalia around suppertime. King Kiato, Captain Ryan, and especially James were overjoyed, as were the rest of the crew and royal household. Since it was late in the day they had to wait until morning to set sail. Kevin, Taryn, and James had dinner with Jameela and Zuberi. Kevin also invited Felix to be their special guest. After dinner they settled in for the night.

The next morning the crew from Athanasia set sail for home. This time there were no pirates. Taryn spent time each day speaking with Felix and learning about his adventures during his life as a sailor.

When they returned to Athanasia, Kevin reported on the trip to his father, King Matthew. The King called for Felix and promoted him to the rank of Ensign, an officer of the Royal Navy, as a reward for his bravery.

Captain Ryan met with King Matthew and Queen Victoria to tell them how well Taryn had represented the kingdom. The Queen was delighted to hear this. Now there would be less concerns from the nobility of the kingdom about Prince Kevin marrying a commoner, should he decide to do so.

* * *

About a week after they returned from their trip, Kevin went to Taryn's house to have dinner with her family. Before dinner he asked her if she would like to take a walk to the river. When they got to the riverside, Kevin stopped and looked deeply into Taryn's eyes.

"Taryn," he began, "I think you are a remarkable woman. You represented the kingdom well in Jabalia, and you stayed by my side while I was injured in New Atlantis. You also were very kind to Felix."

He then got down on one knee and pulled a ring out of his pocket, saying, "You are a beautiful woman and I would be honored if you would spend the rest of your life with me, as my princess and future queen of our land. Taryn, will you marry me?"

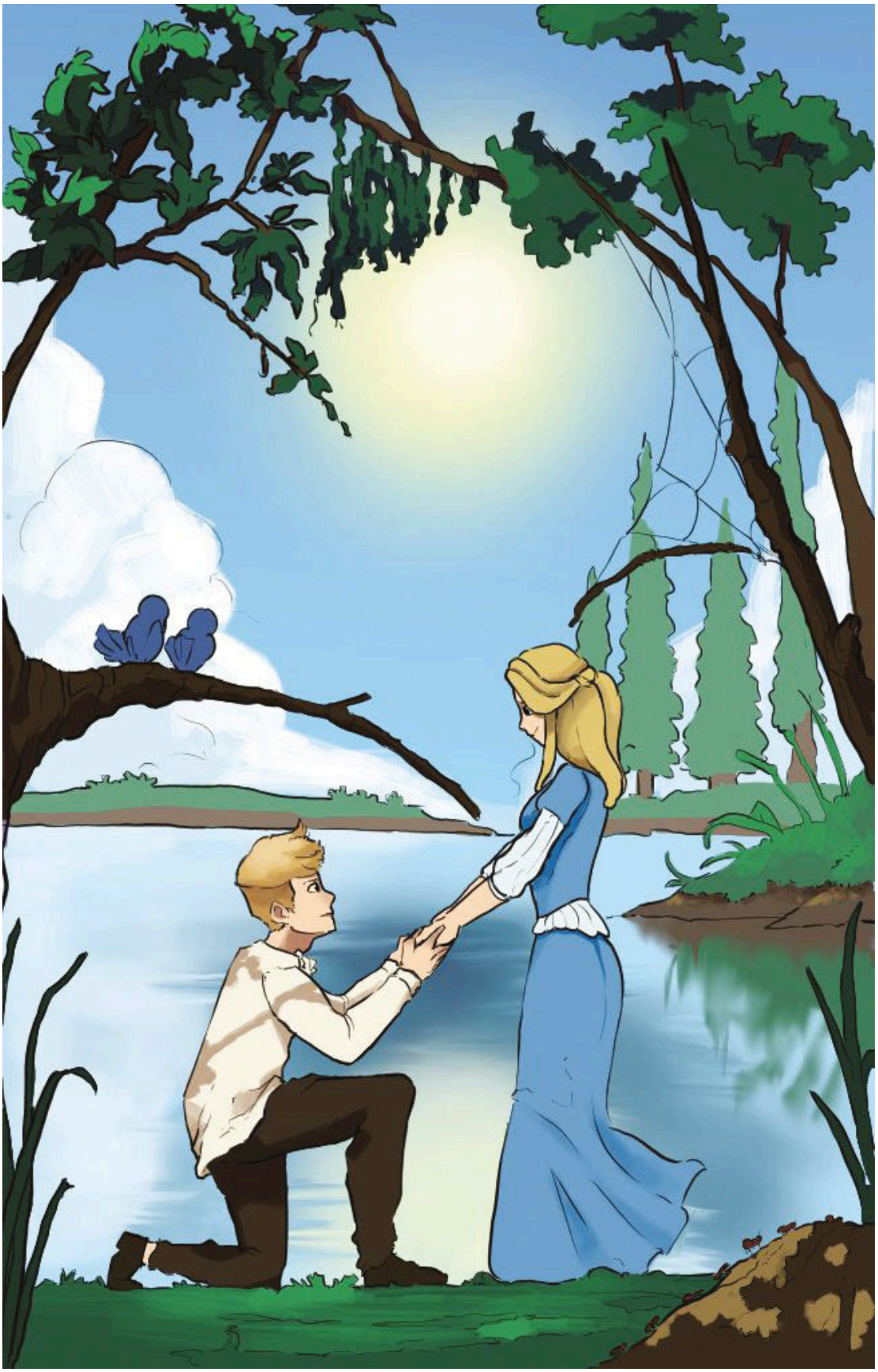
Taryn's eyes grew wide and she gasped. Then she responded, "Oh, my handsome prince! Of course, I will marry you. I love you with all my heart." She jumped into his arms and kissed him as he stood up. They embraced each other for a long moment.

"Come," she said. "Let us go tell my parents. This is the happiest day of my life!"

So, the two of them headed back towards the house as the bright summer sun was getting low in the sky.

THE END

(for now)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Boucher is a free-lance writer who has degrees in mathematics and moral theology. He works in insurance during the day and teaches financial math at night. He is also very involved with his parish's adult faith formation program. Raising two daughters instilled a love of fairy tales and Broadway musicals in Terry. He lives in Connecticut with his family.